

Tift & Company, Ships Chandlery and Icehouse
N.W. Cor. Wall Street and Tift Alley,
Mallory Square
Key West
Monroe County
Florida

HABS No. FLA-176

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. FLA-176

TIFT & COMPANY, SHIPS CHANDLERY AND ICEHOUSE

- Location: Northwest corner Wall Street and Tift Alley, Mallory Square, Key West, Monroe County, Florida.
- USGS Key West Quadrangle, Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates: 17.418260.2716200.
- Present Owner: City of Key West, Florida, 525 Angela Street, Key West, Florida.
- Present Occupant: North half, Chamber of Commerce and City Convention Bureau; South half leased to the Municipal Aquarium and to the Florida State Board of Conservation.
- Present Use: North half, Chamber of Commerce and City Convention Bureau Offices. South half, storage and crawfish hatchery. The cisterns are used as a public recreation area.
- Significance: The northern building is the city's oldest commercial building, and was built by Amos C. Tift and Co. as a ships chandlery. The land on which the building was constructed was part of the Naval Yard during the Island's occupation by Commodore David Porter's anti-pirate squadron from 1823 to 1826.
- The southern building was built as an icehouse. Not until 1890 was artificial ice manufactured at Key West. Until that time, natural ice was shipped in specially built ships from the North. Ice was a vitally important commodity in the tropics for the relief of fever victims.
- The large cisterns in the rear of the buildings were used to collect rainwater which supplied ships calling at the port.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: The Ships Chandlery (the northern building) and the cistern, directly in the rear of this building, were built between 1837-1841 (Deed Book C, p. 125). It is recorded in 1849 that there were two fireproof warehouses and cisterns on the property (Deed Book E, p. 66). The Tift Company advertised ice for sale in a local newspaper of 1855, so presumably the icehouse (the southern building) was constructed by that time.

2. Architect: Unknown.
3. Original and subsequent owners: Fielding A. Browne and William A. Whitehead sold this property to A. C. Tift & Company on June 5, 1837 (Deed Book B., p. 408). Amos C. Tift, elder brother of Asa F. Tift, sold to the latter this property, including a warehouse, cistern, blacksmith shop and wharf, in January 1841 (Deed Book C, p. 125). Asa F. Tift died intestate in 1889 (Probate Book B, p. 304) and his numerous heirs sold this building and the entire area, by this time increased into the present area known as Old Mallory Square, to the New York and Texas Steamship Company in 1901-1902 (Deed Book SS, p. 391, etc.). That company, on November 15, 1906, sold the entire property to the Mallory Steamship Co. (Deed Book W, p. 162). The Mallory Line consolidated with the Clyde Steamship Co. in 1932 (Deed Book G-4, p. 162). Later they became part of the Agwiline Company, which conveyed the property to Gulf Atlantic Transportation Company August 8, 1952 (Deed Book G-64, p. 272) and on August 30, 1952, the property was purchased by the City of Key West (Deed Book G-64, p. 274).
4. Original plans, construction, etc.: The original plans have not been found. The northern building (now occupied by the Chamber of Commerce) and the cistern were built of hand-quarried native stone. A topographical map of 1889 shows no doorway on the Wall Street side. Three openings are shown on the north side. (Sanborn Map of Key West, 1889.)

The Icehouse shared a common wall with the Ships Chandlery. The east and west walls are of rubble mortar. The south wall is of a later period and is of poured concrete. An interior stairway connected office and storage space.

The cisterns were divided into three parts. The north cistern was the largest and earliest cistern, the two on the south side being later additions. The three were under a shallow gable roof of corrugated sheet tin. The three cisterns were of different depths and were reinforced at the corners by buttresses.

6. Alterations and additions:

TIFT & COMPANY, SHIPS
CHANDLERY AND ICEHOUSE
HABS No. FLA-176 (Page 3)

Ships Chandlery (northern building): This building was severely damaged in 1886 fire and not until 1889 was it rebuilt upon the original walls. In 1962 it was remodeled for use by the Chamber of Commerce. No partitions existed at the time the Chamber of Commerce leased the building from the City of Key West, and all partitions, ceilings, wiring and plumbing were done at this time. The shuttered windows and the doorway on the north elevation are old.

E.R. McCarthy, P.E., President, Florida Keys Engineering, Inc., Key West, was in charge of the planning and engineering necessary to the 1963 remodeling and modernization of this building. M.E. Bennett Construction Company was the building contractor. The official opening of the renovated building as the Office of the Chamber of Commerce was September 3, 1963.

Icehouse (southern building): The Sanborn Map of 1886 shows no opening on first floor. The Wall Street doorway and those on the north wall appear to be old. The present Wall Street double doors were replaced about 1958. Exterior stairway was added in 1966 replacing earlier interior stairway.

Cistern: The cisterns have been converted into a recreation space. Interior walls were removed and the floors leveled and finished with terrazzo. The old roof was replaced by a partial roof on the north and west sides, and electric lighting fixtures and convenience outlets installed. Two doorways were cut on these two walls, and a brick planter placed in southwest corner. Work was completed in 1966. The architect was Jerome Pfahning, 3600 Roosevelt Boulevard, Key West. Walter H. Starcke and Daniel Stirrup of Key West supervised construction and engaged all workmen.

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

From 1823 to 1826 when the island was occupied by Commodore David Porter's anti-pirate squadron, the land on which the buildings are presently situated was part of the early naval station.

The Tift family, owners of A.C. Tift and Co., was a prominent Key West family with influence throughout the south during the mid-19th century. Captain Amos Tift of Connecticut, a sea captain and ship owner, came to Key West about 1826 and soon

after that went into the mercantile business. After his death in 1829, his sons, Amos C., Nelson and Asa F., continued operating the business. Amos and Nelson later moved to Georgia and, with other members of the family, became prominent citizens of that state. The Tift name today is represented in Georgia by Tift County, the City of Tift and Tift College.

Asa F. Tift remained in Key West. In 1861, he represented Monroe County at the Florida Secession Convention. Key West, held by Union forces throughout the Civil War, caused Tift and other Southern sympathizers to leave the island. With his brother Nelson, Asa went to Richmond to present a plan to their friend and fellow Key Wester, Stephen R. Mallory, Secretary of the Confederate Navy. By their plan, iron-clad warships could be built, using pine timbers and house carpenters. Mallory accepted the plan, and the first ship named the "Mississippi" was nearing completion when New Orleans fell to Farragut's forces and it was destroyed to prevent its falling into Union hands.

After the war, Asa Tift returned to Key West and built the home known now as the Tift-Hemingway House. (HABS No. FLA-179)

C. Sources of Information:

1. Old views: Bird's-eye view taken from Tift's observation tower, stereo photo circa 1880, copy made by J. Franks Brooks from original owned by Earl Johnson, 322 Duval Street, Key West.

North side view of ships chandlery circa 1960, Don Pinder, photographer, Key West Citizen, 603 Greene Street, Key West.

Rear of Building and part of cistern, circa 1950: Shepard, Berse, Lore of the Wreckers, Beacon Press, Boston, 1961, p. 129.

2. Bibliography:

- a. Primary and unpublished sources:

Adams, Hull, Part of the Florida Reef and Keys including Key West, Stock Island, etc. Topographical survey, 1850 Register #29, U.S. Coast Survey.

Bensel's Directory of City and Island of Key West 1888, Eagle Printing House, Poughkeepsie, New York, p. 179, 227, back of cover.

Monroe County Courthouse Records and Deed Books, County Clerk's Office, Key West, Florida.

Monroe Land Title Company Abstract for lots 4,5, Square 3, Key West, Florida.

Sanborn Map of Key West, Florida, Sanborn Map Co., New York 1886-1926.

b. Secondary and published sources.

Browne, Jefferson B., Key West, The Old and New, The Record Publishing Co., St. Augustine, Florida.

Cappick, Marie, "The Key West Story", Coral Tribune (weekly), Key West, Florida. May 31, 1957, p. 10.
Monroe County Public Library, 700 Fleming Street, Key West.

Durkin, Joseph T., Stephen R. Mallory, Confederate Navy Chief, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 1954, p. 34, 205, 208, 232-238, 247.

Williams, Ida B., History of Tift Co. n.p., n.d.

Prepared by Betty M. Bruce
Old Island Restoration
Foundations, Inc.
Project Historian
HABS Key West Project
July 1967

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: This structure is an excellent example of commercial architecture representing late 19th and early 20th century maritime activity; a composite structure originally consisting of chandlery, storage for pond ice, and three above-grade cisterns.
2. Condition of fabric: Good.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: 131'-7" x 71'-11", one-and-a-half story and single story sections.
2. Foundations: Masonry to grade.
3. Wall construction: Roughly dressed limestone, stucco finish, 1'-7" average thickness; stone rubble and rubble concrete walls incorporating pieces of granite, sandstone, coal, etc.; brick walls; poured concrete walls (traces of wood board formwork remain), some scoring of ashlar pattern in stucco finish.
4. Structural system: Masonry bearing wall with metal tie rods to resist lateral thrust; battered and buttressed walls in cistern construction; wood post and lintel; modified roof trusses for mansard roof of icehouse spaces.
5. Exterior stairway: Stairway at southeast corner added 1966 to provide access to storage in unfinished space above office and icehouse.
6. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: Doorway on east elevation of icehouse is a segmental arched opening with brick surround jamb pattern suggests quoins; two wood board shutters, horizontal and diagonal braces, strap hinges, iron pintles; two five-panel glazed doors, glazed lights at side and head. Doorways into chandlery are of no importance, except for a corbeled drip molding following curve of one arched opening.
 - b. Windows and shutters: Round arched opening into north wall of the chandlery, two wood board shutters per opening, strap hinges, iron pintles.
7. Roof:
 - a. Shape, covering: Mansard roof over icehouse, sheet metal shingles painted brown over near-vertical surfaces, composition shingles on near-flat surfaces. Pyramidal roof over ships chandlery, membrane covering (flint paper); irregular gable roof over portions of cistern (modern), wood shingle covering.

- b. Cornice: Stucco covers corbeled brick cornice except at south elevation.
- c. Dormers, vents: Dormers into mansard roof of icehouse, fragments indicate double-hung windows replaced by wood shutters, one per opening; galvanized metal roof vents into icehouse roof, gravity operated.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

- a. Chandlery: Public spaces including reception and other offices and storeroom occupied by the Chamber of Commerce and the Convention Bureau. Accessible from Wall Street.
- b. Icehouse: Storeroom and work areas for the Municipal Aquarium at southeast corner, first and second floors; office space, reception area and laboratory of the Florida Board of Conservation.
- c. Cistern: Located at west end of structure; fragments indicate that the south cistern was an addition and that the common wall was subsequently removed. The terrazzo floor of the cistern space was added in 1965. Access to the cistern space is through gates in north and west elevations, also added in 1965.

2. Flooring:

- a. Chandlery: Terrazzo (modern).
- b. Icehouse: 3"x 9" wood planks, 3/4" spacing on sleepers, sawdust and rubbish below; office space first floor 3"x9" planks, no space between.

3. Wall and ceiling finish:

- a. Chandlery: Walls are modern plywood over masonry, stucco and exposed rubble masonry. Acoustic tile ceiling.
- b. Icehouse: Exposed rubble masonry and stucco.

4. Doorways and doors: None of importance. Two arched openings in common wall between chandlery and icehouse are closed.

- D. Site: This building faces east on Wall Street, located south of Tift's Alley and east of Mallory Square. A. C. Tift and Co. warehouse (now Waterfront Playhouse) is to the north. A wood shack and fence (not included in this survey) are located at the southwest corner.

Prepared by F. Blair Reeves, AIA
Supervisory Architect
Key West Project 1967
July 1967

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records were prepared in 1967 during a summer project jointly sponsored by the Old Island Restoration Foundation, Inc. of Key West, and the Historic American Buildings Survey. Twenty-two structures were recorded, ranging from commercial structures, residences and hospitals to a convent, a lighthouse, and the Memorial to the Victims of the Disaster of the U.S. Battleship Maine.

The project was under the direction of F. Blair Reeves, AIA, Associate Professor, Department of Architecture, University of Florida. Measured drawings were prepared by student architects John D. Davenport and John F. Grimm of Texas A. and M. University, and John O. Crosby of the University of Florida. Mrs. Betty M. Bruce of the Old Island Restoration Foundation, Inc., and Professor Reeves were responsible for the historical and architectural data. They were assisted by members of the Foundation. J. Franks Brooks, Photographer, of Key West, supplied the photographs.